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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001742

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SUBJECT: TURKEY: AKP PLATFORM: "DON'T LEAVE THE JOB
HALF-FINISHED"

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Classified By: Political Counselor Janice Weiner for reasons 1.4(b),(d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Unveiling his party's platform, PM Erdogan stressed stability and security if voters return his ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) to power in Turkey's July 22 general election. Their focus is on accomplishments to date, with a call to voters, in their words, not to leave the job half-finished. Erdogan emphasized AKP's controversial plans to revise Turkey's 25-year old, military-drafted constitution, further increase the national per capita income, reform higher education and expand basic democratic rights -- proposals that may sow instability rather than calming the waters. Erdogan addressed one of voters' top concerns -- unemployment -- by promising to create jobs for young workers. End summary.

A New Constitution

¶2. (C) Erdogan presented AKP's platform at the party's modest new headquarters, an Ottoman-style palace that some have criticized for its "Turco-Arab Islamic symbolism". He pledged to build a national consensus for a new, "civilian" constitution based on service to the people rather than the traditional statist concept of service to the state. AKP's manifesto also promises to reduce the president's powers, which many argue need to be adjusted before Turkey can shift to direct presidential elections. In particular, the president's power to appoint members to the Higher Education Board (YOK), university rectors and high court judges would be limited. Erdogan, who has battled with little success to revise Turkey's post-1980 coup constitution (reftel), said the new constitution will follow EU standards of fundamental rights and freedoms. Guiding AKP constitutional reform efforts will be Zafer Uskul, an AKP convert from the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) and a constitutional law professor, whose job will include winning opposition support.

¶3. (U) AKP's 253-page election manifesto also touches on education and judicial reform and the fight against corruption. Calling education reform a prerequisite for welfare, stability and competitive power, the party pledges to further increase funding for education and implement new curricula designed to develop basic skills and critical thinking. As part of AKP's "transformation" of the current controversial exam-oriented system, first the High School Entrance Exam (OKS) and later the university exam (OSS) will be replaced after 2008 with new placement exams. Some criticized the AKP platform for failing to address core

issues for some party constituents: the polarizing headscarf ban or reform of the controversial and staunchly secular Higher Education Board (YOK).

Foreign Policy

14. (C) Erdogan called strategic relations with the US the most important element of Turkey's participation in regional and global events. The 20-page foreign policy section tracks with AKP's approach since 2002, suggesting more of the same "problem-free politics with neighbors" if AKP returns to power. One commentator remarked that it was like reading an extract from Erdogan advisor Ahmet Davutoglu's book, "Strategic Depth", which promotes Turkey as a regional power and effective global player that can direct developments rather than react to them. This has, indeed, been AKP's major thrust for the past 4.5 years, and an approach many find unsettling after Turkey's traditional status-quo focus. AKP's manifesto describes Turkey as a European, Asian, Mediterranean, Black Sea, Caspian, Eastern, Western, Southern, Northern, Balkan, Middle Eastern and Caucasian country. The party promises a unified and multifaceted foreign policy, in line with Turkey's historical experience, geographic and cultural depth and strategic location. The platform notes AKP success is opening toward Africa and Latin America, raising Turkey's profile in the OIC and other policies designed to "transform" Turkey into an active player. Rather than a "crisis-based" approach, AKP will pursue "vision-based" policies. By strengthening economic, cultural and political ties with its neighbors, AKP plans to create "a basin of peace and affluence in the region". Joining the EU remains a core AKP objective, and the party is determined to continue the reform process required for

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membership.

Terrorism

15. (SBU) On Turks' top concern and AKP's Achilles heel - terrorism and the PKK - Erdogan noted that improved relations with Northern Iraq are impossible as long as it continues to shelter terrorists. He pledged to meet the Turkish military's needs without hesitation. The status of Kirkuk will also remain a top priority, he added.

Economy

16. (U) Turkey's economic stability is AKP's strongest card, and the party platform promises continued growth and reform. The party's manifesto pledges to raise per capita income to \$10,000 by 2013, after an increase from \$2,400 to \$5,400 during AKP's tenure. AKP promises to retain its core orthodox policies: fiscal discipline, central bank independence and the floating exchange rate -- all issues on which the opposition are, at best, wobbly. AKP's emphasis on developing the private sector will continue, with continued privatization and additional support for new businesses to lower unemployment and bolster the economy. Microcredit projects, primarily in the southeast, and a new, no-guarantee credit fund to be administered at the provincial level will expand private sector opportunities. The party's energy policy is based on lessening Turkey's dependence on foreign energy, establishing a competitive market, developing domestic resources and protecting the environment. AKP supports building nuclear power plants to replace plants fueled by foreign natural gas. Noting that improvements in Turkey's education and judicial systems will bring further economic development, the manifesto promises to transform those institutions.

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